

Message Text

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43

ACTION ORM-02

INFO OCT-01 EA-07 IO-13 ISO-00 DHA-02 VO-03 SCA-01 CIAE-00

INSE-00 DODE-00 SY-05 DEAE-00 SS-15 AID-05 /054 W

----- 084334

R 021132Z SEP 76

FM AMEMBASSY SINGAPORE

TO SECSTATE WASHDC 6104

INFO AMEMBASSY BANGKOK

AMEMBASSY KUALA LUMPUR

AMEMBASSY MANILA

AMEMBASSY JAKARTA

USMISSION USUN NEW YORK

USMISSION GENEVA

AMEMBASSY CANBERRA

C O N F I D E N T I A L SINGAPORE 4144

E.O. 11652: GDS

TAGS: SREF, SN

SUBJ: INDOCHINESE REFUGEES - BOAT CASES

1. DURING CONVERSATION WITH FOREIGN MINISTER RAJARATNAM SEPT. 2 I RAISED SUBJECT OF BOAT CASES, SAYING THAT WHILE WE HAD HITHERTO DISCUSSED THIS MATTER WITH MINISTRY OF HOME AFFAIRS IT WAS NOW BECOMING A MATTER WHICH CONCERNED THE MINISTRY OF FOREIGN AFFAIRS AS WELL. IN THIS RESPECT, BY FAR THE GREATEST VOLUME OF CABLE TRAFFIC WHICH HAD CROSSED MY DESK LATELY DEALT WITH THE PLIGHT OF VIETNAMESE REFUGEES WHO HAD BEEN RESCUED BY SEA CAPTAINS FROM UNSEAWORTHY BOATS OR WHO HAD REACHED VARIOUS SOUTHEAST ASIAN COUNTRIES IN UNSEAWORTHY BOATS, ONLY TO FIND THAT THEY WERE UNWELCOME AND EITHER NOT PERMITTED TO DEBARK OR, ALTERNATIVELY, TO REMAIN.

2. I NOTED THAT IF SEA CAPTAINS CAME TO BELIEVE THAT VIETNAMESE REFUGEES COULD NOT BE LANDED AFTER BEING RESCUED, SUCH RESCUES WOULD NO LONGER TAKE PLACE AND LIVES WOULD BE LOST. I ALSO POINTED OUT THAT COMPELLING REFUGEES WHO ENTERED TERRITORIAL WATERS TO CONTINUE THEIR JOURNEYS AFTER THEIR BOATS WERE GIVEN
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SOME REPAIRS AND PROVISIONING SIMILARLY RISKED LOSS OF LIVES.

THESE HUMANITARIAN FACTORS WERE OF IMPORTANCE TO THE U.S.,
AND I TRUSTED WERE ALSO OF IMPORTANCE TO SINGAPORE.

3. RAJARATNAM MAINTAINED THAT SINGAPORE WAS INDEED AWARE OF THE HUMANITARIAN ASPECTS OF THIS SITUATION. THE PROBLEM, HE SAID, WAS THAT IF "WORD GOT AROUND" IN VIETNAM THAT SINGAPORE WAS RECEPTIVE TO REFUGEES, IT WOULD BE INUNDATED AND ITS SMALL LAND AREA OVERTAXED. I EXPRESSED DOUBT THAT WORD WOULD GET AROUND IN THIS WAY, AND STATED THAT THE REFUGEE FLOW WOULD PROBABLY IN ANY EVENT CONTINUE AND WOULD REQUIRE ACTION. I WAS CONFIDENT THAT IF BOAT REFUGEES WERE ALLOWED TO LAND, THE UNHCR WOULD TAKE CARE OF THEIR ECONOMIC NEEDS PENDING RESETTLEMENT, WHICH I FELT WOULD IN DUE COURSE TAKE PLACE. I RECALLED THE GOOD JOB THE UNHCR HAD ALREADY DONE IN THIS REGARD.

4. RAJARATNAM REFERRED TO THE NEED FOR "GUARANTEES" BY COUNTRIES OUTSIDE THE REGION TO ACCEPT THE REFUGEES, AND I EXPLAINED WHY IT WAS IMPOSSIBLE FOR THE U.S. TO GIVE GUARANTEES IN ADVANCE. I SAID THAT IF REFUGEES COULD BE DEBARKED SO THAT WE COULD ASCERTAIN PAROLE ELIGIBILITY, THERE WERE GOOD PROSPECTS THAT WE COULD TAKE SUBSTANTIAL NUMBERS, PROVIDED OTHER COUNTRIES SUCH AS FRANCE, CANADA, AND AUSTRALIA HELPED OUT WITH THE REST (WE COULD NOT BE THE ONLY RECIPIENTS, HOWEVER). AS AN EXAMPLE, I CITED THE "CAPE ERIMO" SITUATION, NOTING THAT A CHECK OF THE REFUGEES BY OUR VICE CONSUL SUGGESTED THAT 27 OUT OF 31 WERE ELIGIBLE FOR PAROLE, WITH THE OTHER 4 MARGINAL - MY CANADIAN COLLEAGUE HAD SAID HE COULD TAKE THE LATTER EVEN IF WE COULD NOT. NOW THERE WAS NO TELLING WHERE THEY COULD BE LANDED.

5. I CONCLUDED BY STRESSING AGAIN THE HUMANITARIAN ASPECTS OF THE PROBLEM, AND ADDED THAT WE MIGHT BE GETTING BACK TO HIM AGAIN ON THIS. HE REMARKED THAT HE WAS AWARE OF THESE CONSIDERATIONS, WHICH HAD IN FACT FIRST BEEN REVIEWED WITH HIM BY THE AUSTRALIAN HIGH COMMISSIONER (THE AUSTRALIANS HAVING ACCEPTED THE LAST BATCH OF 22 BOAT CASES).

6. COMMENT: I HOPE THAT MY REPRESENTATIONS TO RAJARATNAM WILL HAVE LAID THE GROUNDWORK FOR A FOLLOW-UP ON THE MATTER SUBSEQUENT TO HIGHER-LEVEL ATTENTION BY WALDHEIM OR OTHER APPROPRIATE
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UN FIGURES. HOLDRIDGE

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Message Attributes

Automatic Decaptioning: X
Capture Date: 01 JAN 1994
Channel Indicators: n/a
Current Classification: UNCLASSIFIED
Concepts: REFUGEE RESETTLEMENT
Control Number: n/a
Copy: SINGLE
Draft Date: 02 SEP 1976
Decaption Date: 01 JAN 1960
Decaption Note:
Disposition Action: RELEASED
Disposition Approved on Date:
Disposition Authority: saccheem
Disposition Case Number: n/a
Disposition Comment: 25 YEAR REVIEW
Disposition Date: 28 MAY 2004
Disposition Event:
Disposition History: n/a
Disposition Reason:
Disposition Remarks:
Document Number: 1976SINGAP04144
Document Source: CORE
Document Unique ID: 00
Drafter: n/a
Enclosure: n/a
Executive Order: GS
Errors: N/A
Film Number: D760333-0925
From: SINGAPORE
Handling Restrictions: n/a
Image Path:
ISecure: 1
Legacy Key: link1976/newtext/t19760997/aaaadezf.tel
Line Count: 108
Locator: TEXT ON-LINE, ON MICROFILM
Office: ACTION ORM
Original Classification: CONFIDENTIAL
Original Handling Restrictions: n/a
Original Previous Classification: n/a
Original Previous Handling Restrictions: n/a
Page Count: 2
Previous Channel Indicators: n/a
Previous Classification: CONFIDENTIAL
Previous Handling Restrictions: n/a
Reference: n/a
Review Action: RELEASED, APPROVED
Review Authority: saccheem
Review Comment: n/a
Review Content Flags:
Review Date: 12 MAY 2004
Review Event:
Review Exemptions: n/a
Review History: RELEASED <12 MAY 2004 by greeneet>; APPROVED <13 SEP 2004 by saccheem>
Review Markings:

Margaret P. Grafeld
Declassified/Released
US Department of State
EO Systematic Review
04 MAY 2006

Review Media Identifier:
Review Referrals: n/a
Review Release Date: n/a
Review Release Event: n/a
Review Transfer Date:
Review Withdrawn Fields: n/a
Secure: OPEN
Status: NATIVE
Subject: INDOCHINESE REFUGEES - BOAT CASES
TAGS: SREF, SN
To: STATE
Type: TE
Markings: Margaret P. Grafeld Declassified/Released US Department of State EO Systematic Review 04 MAY 2006